

Food For Thought
From Your Employee Assistance Program

Getting Ready For Summer

Prepare for summer. With summer just around the corner, it's not too early to begin planning summer activities. Whether you are planning a summer vacation or just staying around the house, making your summer stress-free can be a challenge. Here are some things to help you plan a fun, enjoyable, and safe summer:

Choose the vacation that fits your style. Taking a vacation or small breaks during the summer months can help you re-energize, recuperate and renew. When you return to work you will feel more motivated, refreshed, and ready to take on work challenges. Here are some tips to consider when planning your summer vacation whether it is solo, with a friend, loved one, or children:

- Plan your vacation ahead of time. Think ahead of time about the activities you plan to do. This may help prevent arguments while on vacation. You can develop an activity list by checking the tourism section of the destination's brochure or web site.
- How about a mini-vacation? Many people prefer several mini-vacations to an extended vacation. Weekend trips may be very appealing to employees with busy work schedules, according to a travel industry guide.
- How about local day trips? You may find local day activities to be a great way to spend your summer. Some suggestions include: a day in a state park, museum, or local library, or just a relaxing at the pool, or visiting a friend or neighbor.

Plan your vacation. Preparing for vacation can be exhausting and time consuming. Here are some things that you can do ahead of time to make a safer and less stressful trip.

- If driving to your destination, have your car serviced ahead of time to avoid potential problems. Plan where and when breaks will be taken.
- Plan for potential emergencies. Have a medical first aid kit available, and any necessary emergency telephone numbers.

- Have some games and activities planned for the trip. Magnetic game boards, books, music, and educational games are some ideas.
- Prepare snacks that are nutritious and that are low in sugar.
- Prepare for all weather conditions. Check out the forecast for your destination. Plan and pack accordingly.

Plan your finances. A summer vacation can be a very expensive endeavor. The best way to plan your vacation is researching early, to determine what type of vacation you can afford within your budget.

- Start early. Being the “early bird” means getting the best bargains sometimes. The earlier you decide which type of vacation you want and your price range the better.
- Include vacation money in your financial planning. Open a separate vacation account. Talk to your banking representative to see what type of account best suits your needs.
- Shop around for the best bargain. If a price seems too good to be true, it probably is
- Use traveler’s checks. They are much safer than cash.
- Have spending limits and discuss these limits ahead of time. If children are part of your vacation consider giving them a vacation allowance. This lessens the number of financial requests from children and teaches responsibility.

Protect your home. Home safety is always important, but we do not always think about home safety when we are enjoying our vacation. Here are some ways to protect your home while you are away.

- Have good locks on all doors and windows and use them.
- Do not leave your house key hidden outside your home.
- Ask a neighbor to watch the house while you are away. Leave an address and telephone number with a neighbor so you can be reached in case of an emergency.
- Stop all deliveries, or arrange for a neighbor to pick up your mail.

- Plug in timers to turn lights, a radio or television on and off at appropriate times.
- Do not announce your absence on answering machines.

Find stress-free summer activities for kids. For many families it is a struggle to balance the demands of adult work schedules with providing safe activities for children. Here are some suggestions to help you avoid hectic, stress filled summer days.

- Keep and display a family calendar. A calendar from the end of the school year to next fall listing the child's and family activities is a great way to organize new routines and schedules for the upcoming summer months. This gives children an idea of what is going on, and gives parents an idea of potential scheduling conflicts.
- Visit the library. Children and adults can participate in activities that include reading aloud, storytelling, and plays. Younger children may enjoy puppet shows, and arts and crafts activities. Many libraries may also offer training courses for computer programs for children of all ages.
- Enroll in a summer camp. There are many summer camps that have specific activities tailored to a child's interests and the parents needs. Overnight camps have varying activities and lengths of stay depending on the parent and child's comfort level. A day camp is another option that includes activities for children of all ages.
- Choosing a camp. How do parents know which camp is best for their child? That depends on many different factors including the child's age, how easily he or she handles separation from the family, the child's interests and unique needs—and the parents own preferences. Day camp is typically the best choice for younger children because they can spend the day with other children their age and return to their own home and family at night. For parents considering sleep-away camps, it's best that the child be both old enough and emotionally ready for the experience. The American Camping Association and the National Camp Association recommend that a child be at least six years old to attend a residential camp. In addition, the child should possess a sense of independence, and the ability to adapt to nights away from home.

Another strong indicator of readiness is when the child expresses an interest in going away to camp. To help prevent homesickness at sleep-away camps, parents should select a camp that is close to home. It is also a good idea, if possible, to consider having the child attend with a friend or relative. Another way for parents to smooth the transition to a sleep-away camp is to arrange for their child to contact another camper prior to attending camp (the director may be able to provide a list of names of campers who will be in the same cabin). This way, the child will know at least one other child when he or she arrives. Parents should remember that most children need a few days to adjust to being away from home, so they shouldn't panic if their child expresses homesickness the first few days of camp. Usually, homesickness fades with time, as a child makes friends and becomes comfortable in the camp's surroundings.

For more information please contact the DEA Employee Assistance Program at 1-800-275-7460 or 202-307-8160.

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